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Statewide Role and Mission for Higher Education

Background

“An institution’s mission and goals define the institution, including its educational activities, its student body, and its role within the higher education community.”¹ A system of higher education should be more than the sum of its parts; however, an absence of any clear or officially acknowledged consensus on the roles and missions of the institutions and the sectors they comprise makes coordination among institutions cumbersome and leaves Washington vulnerable to mission creep, uncontrolled expansion, and unnecessary program duplication. While a number of strategies have been employed to address these problems, it is only through a shared understanding of the statewide role and mission of higher education that institutions will be free to innovate and create new programs and delivery modalities without unnecessarily duplicating efforts and creating inefficiencies.

The Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) has statutory responsibility to review the role and mission statements of the public institutions of higher education every four years, as it develops the strategic master plan for higher education. It is the responsibility of the governing board of each college and university to approve and periodically review their institutional role and mission. While there is no mandated cycle for institutional review of role and mission, institutions do have a responsibility to develop a strategic plan that aligns with the development and goals expressed in the statewide strategic master plan for higher education. Institutions may reasonably be expected to review their own role and mission as part of this planning process.

The last review of institutional role and mission statements conducted by HECB staff was completed in 2003, concurrent with development of the *2004 Statewide Strategic Master Plan*. In December 2003, the board adopted the interim master plan and, in that document, a statewide mission for higher education was articulated as follows:

“The mission of Washington’s higher education system is to support the economic, cultural and civic vitality of the state through education, research and public service to provide tangible benefits to residents, businesses and communities.”

In the short time since that last review in 2003, a great number of changes have taken place across Washington’s higher education system. The passage of House Bill 3103 in 2004 led to a number of changes in the way the HECB interacts with the universities, including a more active

¹ Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities – Accreditation Standard 1.

role in academic planning with the requirement for a statewide and regional assessment of higher education needs and more rigorous accountability provisions. In addition, key changes in the higher education system are being implemented following the passage of House Bill 1794 in 2005 and House Bill 2867 in 2006, which authorized the branch campuses of the research institutions to transition from upper-division/graduate campuses to four-year campuses; enrolling freshmen and sophomores. In addition, HB 1794 authorized up to four community and technical colleges to offer baccalaureate degree programs in applied fields. As a result, the state has increased the number of public institutions where students are able to enroll continuously to earn a baccalaureate degree from six to 14.

The legislation also provided for the development of a university center model of delivery, using a contracting approach that would allow three community and technical colleges to fund baccalaureate programs offered through partnerships with the regional universities, branch campuses, or The Evergreen State College. The university center model was also supported through a change in management of the North Snohomish, Island, and Skagit consortium, giving administrative responsibility to Everett Community College. The center was renamed the Everett University Center and, through House Bill 3113 passed in 2006, Everett Community College will fund enrollments at the center through a model similar to that piloted in HB 1794. Finally, the HECB is in the process of assessing the need for a new higher education resource (or resources) in the Snohomish, Island, and Skagit county region, which could potentially lead to development of a new public baccalaureate institution in that region.

These provisions, in various stages of implementation, have been outlined in several reports and updates to the board; often in isolation. While the expansion outlined above is certainly significant for individual institutions and sectors, it also marks a dramatic shift in the size and shape of Washington's public higher education system. This shift will certainly affect how students and communities are served into the future.

In reviewing the mission statements of the campuses involved in these initiatives, HECB staff find the statements to be broadly enough constructed to allow for each change. In looking at the changes taking place to implement these new initiatives, we find for many institutions, this is nothing short of a sea change. The branches have not only had to ramp up new curricula, they are dealing with first-time college students and their parents on a level these institutions have never dealt with before; a change that affects the entire institution from the most basic services, student/faculty relationships, and culture.

A similar change is underway, although in earlier stages, at the community and technical colleges. Four institutions are preparing for their first baccalaureate-level programs. This development also will send ripples throughout all corners of the institutions. Elevating these colleges to baccalaureate degree-granting institutions affects faculty, student services, staff, libraries, and other academic resources as well as students.

The contract programs in which FTE funding is awarded to the community and technical colleges to enter into contracts with a regional institution and/or branch campus to deliver upper-division coursework leading to a degree represent a much less substantive change; but,

nonetheless, requires significant planning. This has been especially true of the Everett Center. Staff at Everett Community College first had to meet an unforgiving deadline to plan the transition, and now are doing the hard work of attracting partners to deliver coursework and programs, as well as working to inform students about available opportunities.

Analysis

In a very short time, the higher education landscape in Washington has changed dramatically. We have moved from six baccalaureate granting institutions to 14 in a few short years, and we are considering adding a fifteenth. These changes are the result of a decentralized system of higher education in a state that is struggling to meet increasing demand for higher education with limited capacity for growth. This is not to say we are not moving in the right direction, but what is missing is a map. A role and mission statement that describes the roles and responsibilities of each sector within the higher education system would provide that map.

The transformation of the branch campuses from upper-division and graduate institutions into four-year universities enrolling freshmen is the result of multiple studies; first by the Washington Institute for Public Policy, and then by the institutions -- with recommendations from the HECB. On a parallel track, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) was working on alternative delivery models to meet the demand for upper-division enrollments that was not being met by the existing baccalaureate institutions leading to the pilot programs authorized by HB 1794.

A key challenge in evaluating new academic degree-granting program proposals as they come forward, and assessing the success of new initiatives, is that our system of higher education has, until now, been loosely defined without a clear understanding of how the pieces fit together. The development of a system-wide approach to characterizing and defining institutional role and mission can lead to a better understanding of the resources currently available and inform planning of new resources in a way that fosters collaboration, rather than competition. The end result would be a system that is greater than its parts.

Development of a Statewide Role and Mission for Higher Education

The development of a statewide role and mission for higher education is an essential step in understanding where our higher education system is today and how to move forward toward our goals for the system. A statewide role and mission for higher education will drive academic and resource planning in higher education and will therefore be the touchstone for working toward the master plan goals of increasing the number of degrees produced in the state and responding to the economic development needs of the state.

The role and mission of the higher education system is distinguished from the vision for the higher education system in the state. Role and mission describes what the system does in the near term, while a vision for higher education is an aspirational statement about where the higher

education system should move in the future. While both are critical to long-term strategic planning and program and facility planning, the focus of this work is on role and mission -- while the strategic master plan development will continue to focus on the vision for the future of higher education in Washington.

A statewide role and mission for higher education is critical to understanding our various institutions of higher education as a system. The clear articulation of role and mission would serve to engender the shared sense of purpose necessary to move toward a system that operates based upon agreed upon goals and measurable outcomes, and one that recognizes the interdependency of institutions and sectors.

Development of a statewide role and mission for higher education is a process that will necessarily involve a variety of stakeholders. For the purpose of beginning the discussion, language is included in this document that builds upon the statement articulated in the interim strategic master plan; however, it is not presented with the intent that the board adopt it in its current form. Instead, the intent is to move the conversation from an internal examination of the higher education system to an inclusive process involving higher education stakeholders.

Washington Statewide Role and Mission for Higher Education

The mission of Washington's higher education system is to support the economic, cultural, and civic vitality of the state through education, research, and public service to provide tangible benefits to residents, businesses, and communities.

The public higher education system in Washington is comprised of three sectors. While the institutions that make up these sectors are unique, they share a common set of characteristics that describe how they contribute to the higher education system in Washington.

Research University Systems

Offer bachelor's, master's and doctorate degrees;
Maintain and develop nationally recognized academic and professional programs;
Foster the creation of new knowledge through organized programs of research;
Promote extension and outreach, including the continued growth of branch campuses; and
Respond to statewide needs for certain major lines of study and types of degrees.

Washington State University

As a public land-grant and research institution of distinction, Washington State University enhances the intellectual, creative, and practical abilities of the individuals, institutions, and communities that we serve by fostering learning, inquiry, and engagement.

University of Washington

The primary mission of the University of Washington is the preservation, advancement, and dissemination of knowledge. The University preserves knowledge through its libraries and collections, its courses, and the scholarship of its faculty. It advances new knowledge through many forms of research, inquiry, and discussion; and disseminates it through the classroom and the laboratory, scholarly exchanges, creative practice, international education, and public service.

Regional Institutions

Offer bachelor's and master's degree programs;
Respond to the educational and professional needs of the residents of the region;
Provide programs that continue or otherwise integrate with those offered by the region's community colleges;
Engage in scholarly activity including research, scholarship and creative endeavor; and
Engage in community service in response to the region's economic, educational, and cultural needs.

Eastern Washington University

Eastern Washington University is a student-centered, regionally based, comprehensive university. Its campus is located in Cheney, within the Spokane metropolitan area, with additional learning centers in the region and elsewhere in Washington state. Its mission is to prepare broadly educated, technologically proficient, and highly productive citizens to attain meaningful careers, to enjoy enriched lives, and to make contributions to a culturally diverse society.

Western Washington University

As a public comprehensive university focusing primarily on serving undergraduate students throughout the region, Western Washington University is dedicated to the pursuit of truth, learning and the dissemination and development of knowledge, and service to the community.

Central Washington University

Central Washington University's mission is to prepare students for responsible citizenship, responsible stewardship of the earth, and enlightened and productive lives. Faculty, staff, students, and alumni serve as an intellectual resource to assist Central Washington, the state, and the region in solving human and environmental problems.

The Evergreen State College

The Evergreen State College is a public, liberal arts college serving Washington state. Its mission is to help students realize their potential through innovative, interdisciplinary educational programs in the arts, social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences. In addition to preparing students within their academic fields, Evergreen provides graduates with the fundamental skills to communicate, to solve problems, and to work collaboratively and independently in addressing real issues and problems.

The Community and Technical College System

Offers associate degrees and sub-baccalaureate professional certificates;
Offers programs that prepare students for occupations and academic transfer;
Provides community services of an educational, cultural, and recreational nature;
Provides basic skills and literacy education;
Serves community needs for workforce education including supplemental education for apprentices; and
Provides access through an “open door” admission policy.

Community and Technical Colleges

- *Access to affordable higher education;*
- *Workforce education and training for the 21st century;*
- *Increase basic skills;*
- *Provide quality academic transfer programs;*
- *Diversity of students and programs;*
- *Student achievement; and*
- *A first-class faculty and staff*

Next Steps

With consent of the board, staff will circulate the proposed statewide role and mission statement among the institutions and request that they review their mission statements and comment on the statewide framework outlined above. Staff will return to the board at the December 2006 meeting with a revised statewide role and mission statement for discussion and action and the institutional role and mission statements as revised or affirmed by their respective governing boards.